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Coping with an Uncertain Future: Religiosity and Millenarianism

By Christian Zwingmann and Sebastian Murken

Abstract

In a variety of ways, religiosity can help maintain or restore one's future capacity to act. Broadening the coping perspective for the psychology of religion (Pargament, 1997) seems to be an adequate theoretical framework for a differentiated analysis of who uses religiosity at what point, in what manner, and with which kind of outcomes in the process of coping with the future. We will introduce this approach and summarize the empirical results that are available up to now. Subsequently, we will be occupied with religious cognitions about the future in a narrower sense: with the so-called millenarian or chiliastic ideas of some religious communities about the imminent end of this world. First, we will work out the specific criteria of such cognitions. Based on the approach of religious coping we will then examine whether millenarianism can be helpful in coping with the future. Our functional analysis proposes that central elements of chiliastic ideas serve to convince the believer that his life has meaning and purpose despite the obvious suffering and evil in the world. However, specific difficulties and risks are intertwined with chiliastic forms of coping with the future, namely: the derogation of this world, the problems arising from a prediction of explicit dates for the end of the world, and the connection between millenarianism and violence.

1. Introduction

The future is uncertain. That is the only thing people really know for sure about future events. Despite this uncertainty, people have to plan and carry out actions. According to authors oriented towards attribution theory (e.g. Flammer, 1990; Kelvin, 1970; Shaver, 1975; Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985), this basic necessity of human life is reflected in two deeply rooted motives which are related to each other: the *need for meaning* and the *need for control*. Only if people manage, despite all that uncertainty, to keep up the conviction that their surroundings are arranged in a meaningful order and organized in susceptible ways, are they able to estimate the consequences of their actions and adopt a positive attitude towards the future.

If a person feels threatened or hampered in his/her ability to act because of critical life events, daily chronic and work-related strain, or because of emotions, a stress situation is produced, in which existing contexts of meaning and ideas about control appear questionable. Cognitive and behavioral ways of coping can be interpreted as an attempt to maintain or restore one's future ability to act and, thus, as meaning and control (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger,

& Gorsuch, 1996). In short: coping means handling the future in times of crisis; Pargament (1997, p. 90) speaks in this context about "a search for significance in times of stress."[1]

In their influential, theoretical approach, Lazarus and Folkman (1984) conceptualize coping as a transactional process, a continuous, mutual interaction between person and situation. Not only do attempts at coping change the situative challenges, but changes in the situation conversely also change future adaptive efforts. The analysis of the coping process focuses on the cognitive appraisal of the situative threat (*primary appraisal*), the access and adequacy of specific coping strategies (*secondary appraisal*), and the success of coping (*reappraisal*). These steps are undergone sequentially and repeatedly. Various personality variables, which Pargament (1997) sums up as personal *orienting system* with specific possibilities and limitations, on the one hand, organize these processes of appraisal and, on the other hand, are changed by them.

Can the psychology of religion contribute to a deeper understanding of the necessity to cope with future events? In the present paper we want to approach the interrelated subjects of "religiosity" and "future" from a general, as well as from a specific, perspective. Especially following Pargament (1997), we will pursue the question of how important religiosity can be for coping with the future. From a specific perspective, we will focus on religious cognitions about the future in a narrower sense: on so-called millenarian or chiliastic ideas about the imminent end of this world. On the basis of our general analysis we will examine in particular which possibilities and risks are brought about by such expectations of the end of days.

We conceptualize religiosity with Pargament (1997) – simultaneously substantially and functionally (Berger, 1974) – as a "search for significance in ways related to the sacred" (p. 32), i.e. a search for significance in reference to a reality that is perceived as transcendental. This definition leads to a specific theoretical position, namely that coping and religiosity are both based on a common motivating power: the search for significance. However, the focus differs: Coping is limited to stress situations (and can, but does not need to, include religious attempts of coping); religiosity always contains a reference to the transcendental (and is not limited to stress situations).

2. *Religiosity as a Means of Coping with the Future*

The credit for promoting and broadening the coping perspective for the psychology of religion, and for collecting the scattered empirical contributions of other researchers, systematically goes to Pargament (1996a, 1996b,

[1] Since the terms "meaning" and "control" are connected with "a distinctly positive connotation", Pargament (1997, p. 467) prefers the term "significance" to emphasize that "the attainment of significance does not necessarily bring happiness or well-being."

1997) and his co-workers (Pargament et al., 1988, 1990, 1992). We therefore refer primarily to Pargament when, in the following pages, we pursue the basic question of what role religiosity plays in coping with the future.

The research of Pargament and his collaborators includes, on the one hand, quantitative approaches; on the other hand, it includes qualitative analyses on the basis of interviews and participant observations. Especially the case studies, analyzed in exemplary fashion by Pargament, enhance the fact that religiosity is intertwined with the coping process in a variety of ways and with rather different outcomes. If one takes these variations seriously, one should avoid sweeping judgments in the frequent discussions about healthy vs. unhealthy religion – in the big Christian churches, as well as in other Christian communities, in so-called New Religious Movements or anywhere else (cf. Murken, 1997). Decisive is an individual-oriented, or at least differential, examination: Who uses religiosity, in which way and with what possible outcome in coping with the future? To answer these questions, some empirical evidence is summarized below:

Who includes religiosity in coping? It is hardly surprising that studies of various research teams demonstrate that primarily religious people or those involved in church activities do this; that is to say, people with an orienting system that comprises religious references. Certain socio-demographic groups with a higher degree of religiosity – women, the elderly, non-whites – are overrepresented here. Of course, religious people also use non-religious coping strategies. Their preference for religious strategies – instead of the non-religious alternatives – cannot be explained solely by the availability of religious coping strategies. Furthermore, one has to assume that religiously active people use religious coping strategies, because they are more plausible than non-religious alternatives in specific situations and contexts (Spilka et al., 1985).

When is religiosity included in coping with the future? According to Pargament (1997), religious rather than non-religious coping strategies are particularly preferred in stress situations caused by threat and/or fear of loss (e.g., serious and life-threatening diseases, surgery, death of a close person, notice of termination, catastrophes). However, in life situations that are positive challenges for the people concerned, the latter prefer non-religious coping strategies. Religious coping with the future thus seems to be particularly attractive in situations concerning the limits – not the possibilities – of human existence.

How is religiosity included in coping? Coping strategies can be classified and differentiated in the following ways: 1. content-oriented deductive, 2. content-oriented inductive, and 3. functional criteria of order. According to each of these criteria, Pargament's team has worked out a suggestion of classification:

1. Based on control theory, Pargament et al. (1988; Pargament, 1997) identified four cognitive "religious styles of problem solving" which are relatively

independent of specific situations. These styles differ in the extent to which responsibility in coping is attributed to whom – people, the transcendental or God, or both:

- The *self-directing style* is characterized by the assumption that people rely on themselves to solve problems. God is only involved in so far as he has bestowed the necessary abilities on people. The stressed person actively looks for solutions of problems (*control by the self*).
- The *collaborative style* implies that people solve their problems together with God. The stressed person actively looks for solutions, in the process of which he perceives God as a partner (*control with God*).
- The *petitionary style* assumes that people can only solve their life problems with active support by God. On the one hand, the stressed person can actively ask for this support; on the other hand, that person is passively dependent on God's intervention (*control through God*).
- The *deferring style* implies that people cannot contribute in any way to solve their life problems, but are totally dependent on God. The stressed person waits passively for God's interference (*control by God*).[2]

2. Based primarily on interviews, Pargament et al. (1990) developed a list of items with religious coping activities that could be reduced by factor analysis to the following six dimensions:

- *spiritual contacting of God* (e.g. "I sought God's love and care"; "God showed me how to deal with the situation"; "I trusted that God would not let anything terrible happen to me"),
- *increased number of good deeds* (e.g. "I tried to lead a more loving life"; "I offered help to other church members"; "I confessed my sins"),
- *discontent with church members or with God* ("I expressed feelings of anger or distance from the members of the church"; "I expressed feelings of anger or distance from God"; "I questioned my religious beliefs and faith"),
- *search for social support in a religious context* ("I sought support from clergy"; "I sought support from other members of the church"),
- *requests of God and bargaining with God* (e.g. "I begged for God's help"; "I asked for a miracle"; "I bargained with God to make things better"),
- *religious avoidance strategies* (e.g. "I focused on the world-to-come rather than the problems of this world"; "I prayed or read the Bible to keep my mind off the problems"; "I let God solve my problems for me").

[2] Pargament et al. (1988) developed questionnaire scales for the self-directing, the collaborative and the deferring coping styles that show some clear correlations: The scales for the collaborative and the deferring style correlate positively with each other and negatively with the self-directed scale.

3. From a functional perspective Pargament (1996b, 1997) distinguishes between conservation and transformation of means and ends. As a result, figure 1 shows a four-field typology.

Figure 1: Conservation and transformation of means and ends: four kinds of coping strategies from a functional perspective

	conservation of ends	transformation of ends
conservation of means	*preservation*	re-valuation
transformation of means	*reconstruction*	*re-creation*

Each of these four fields can ideally be related to certain religious coping strategies. This entails the assumption that the related strategies are particularly adequate for the respective functional kind of coping. One should bear in mind, however, that coping strategies are variable; thus, their concrete functions depend on the intention of the coping person.

- *Preservation*: Conservation of ends as well as means exists when people react in stress situations according to the pattern "more of the same." This can be expressed by *a)* an intensification of religious efforts, in an intensified search for *b)* spiritual support by God or for *c)* social support in a religious context. If goals in religious life are even jeopardized themselves, it is possible that *d)* physical or at least mental boundaries are set up between the religious and the secular world.
- *Reconstruction*: Conservation of ends combined with transformation of means exists when in times of crises changes of interpretation and behavior are utilized to maintain one's original ends. In a religious context this can be expressed by *a)* a positive or negative religious reframing in regard to the situation (e.g. "spiritual challenge"), oneself (e.g. "imperfect person with limited abilities to grasp the significance of the situation", "sinful person") or the transcendental (e.g. "punishing God", "Satan fighting God"). An improvement to one's relationship with God, and thus the "right" way, can be sought for by *b)* religious purification rituals. Finally, there is *c)* the possibility of adapting the religious orienting system to new burdens by permanent changes of the image of God or by a switch to another religious community.
- *Re-valuation*: Transformation of ends combined with conservation of means is found in times of transition, when old values are lost, new life goals have to be found, and yet, a stable frame for this transitional process is searched for. *a)* Religious rituals of the transitions between different life phases can be considered as *re-valuations*. Such rituals confront new life goals; simultaneously, however, they offer a permanent religious interpretative context. Besides, *b)* new life goals can be searched for by turning to

the transcendental and can be interpreted as direct signals from God, thus being embedded in a religious continuity.

- *Re-creation*: Transformation of ends as well as means exists when a radical change, a completely new life is striven for in crises. In a religious context one finds *re-creation a)* in gradual or sudden conversions which are mostly described as radical changes of self-perception. On the one hand, the convert experiences the limits of his/her human possibilities; on the other hand, he/she believes him/herself to have new strength through a direct transcendental attachment. *b)* Religious forgiving can frequently be understood as a fundamental change of perspective, too: from a life determined by suffering and injustice to personal and social peace achieved with God's help.

With what outcome is religiosity utilized in the coping process? Empirical research does not exist for all of the religious coping strategies mentioned above. According to the results of various research teams, which are presented by Pargament (1997) in tabular form, the collaborative style, the search for spiritual support by God, positive forms of religious reframing, and the search for social support in the religious context can all be considered rather helpful in coping with stress. Unhappiness with the religious community or with God, negative forms of religious reframing and religious avoidance strategies, however, seem to be rather disadvantageous.[3] The self-directing and the deferring coping styles, marking boundaries between the religious and the secular world, religious rituals, switching religious communities, and religious conversion experiences produce mixed coping outcomes. Based on the works of O'Connor and Vallerand (1990) and Ryan, Rigby, and King (1993), one can additionally conclude that religious coping strategies can only be supportive if they are used with a self-determined deep inner conviction. If religious coping strategies are only used to comply with external or internal expectations of how things ought to be done, no positive effects are to be expected (cf. Zwingmann, Rumpf, Moosbrugger, & Frank, 1996, pp. 111ff.). As shown by Pargament (1996a, 1997; Pargament et al., 1990), in predicting the outcomes of coping by means of regression analysis, religious coping activities account for additional variance components, which are not explained by non-religious coping strategies.

Overall, the broadening of the coping perspective for the psychology of religion by Pargament and his co-workers is a very promising approach to examine how religiosity can be involved in maintaining or restoring one's future abilities to act. By approaching "religious coping with the future" from a specific perspective; i.e. analyzing religious ideas about an imminent end of

[3] Based on these results, Pargament (1997) developed a short questionnaire (RCOPE) with two dimensions: "positive religious coping" and "negative religious coping."

the world, we will pursue the question of how far such religious chiliastic expectations are forms of coping with life crises, and which possibilities and risks could result from them. Pargament's terminology can, at least partially, be adopted.

3. Chiliastic Cognitions of the Future: "The End is Near"

In many religions one can find eschatological statements about the end of the world and mankind. In some religious communities, however, these are understood as predictions of concrete events which can be observed empirically and which will take place in the near future; in some cases, they are even dated to a specific day of the calendar. Such expectations of the imminent end of this world are also called apocalyptic, chiliastic, or millenarian.

"Apocalyptic" (Greek: *apokalýptein* = reveal, uncover) describes a historical undercurrent of Judeo-Christian piousness centering on the hope for an imminent end of the world and a new future of God (Erlemann, 1996). Literary documents, various visionary revelations, and so-called apocalypses, spring from this movement, which was also influenced by dualistic elements of Egyptian and Persian religions (Cohn, 1997). Biblical examples of such writings are: the "Book of Daniel" in the Old Testament and the "Book of Revelation" in the New Testament. Referring to the expectation of a millennium of peace of Christ's reign on earth described in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 20,4), the terms "chiliasm" (Greek: *chílioi* = thousand) and – with the same meaning – "millenarianism" (Latin: *mille* = thousand) are used as collective terms to define religious movements which are characterized by expectations of the imminent end of the world.[4]

Christianity developed out of Judaism as a fundamentally chiliastic movement. Representatives of the historical-critical approach among theologians assume that Jesus lived with the concrete expectation of the eschatological last days and that the early Christian community derived its hope after Easter from the belief in an imminent return of the risen Christ with power and glory ("Parousia", Greek: *parousía* = presence, arrival). Because of the non-appearance of the Parousia ("postponement of Parousia"), institutionalized Christianity adapted to a life in this world motivated by faith. Renouncing the concrete apocalyptic imagery, the theology of the major Christian churches, meanwhile, does not understand eschatological statements as "anticipating reports of a future to come" (Rahner, 1984, p. 415), but as "transla-

[4] The term "millennium" is also synonymous with a period of 1000 years. Coming closer to the end of a millennium and the beginning of a new one obviously nourishes chiliastic ideas based on the symbolic date 2000 (Thompson, 1996). However, chiliastic expectations are by no means limited to the turn of the millennium or are necessarily connected with it.

tion of the Christian experience from present to future" (p. 416; cf. also Kehl, 1997).

Nevertheless, chiliastic countercurrents developed repeatedly after the institutionalization of the Church (Olson, 1982; Selge, 1997); additionally, millenarian elements were further disseminated during colonial times and even found their way into the cyclical philosophies of Buddhist and Hindu groups (Schweer, 1987; Wessinger, 1997). Consequently, an explicit Judeo-Christian reference is not necessary for a religious group to be spoken of as chiliastic; frequently one encounters syncretistic ideas, in which biblical motives play one role among many others.[5] On the contrary, chiliastic or millenarian characteristics are the following (McGinn, 1994; Robbins & Palmer, 1997; Wessinger, 1997):

- History is seen as a place of teleological superhuman actions with determined future scenarios. For the most part, these scenarios describe the end of all time, less frequently – in cyclical philosophies – transitions between historical phases.
- The salvation in the millennium is firmly tied to history and therefore cannot be reached individually after death in the next world, but only – according to a superhuman plan – for all the "just" in this world.
- Current events are interpreted as key signals for an imminent approach of the determined scenarios of the future. The present is experienced as the beginning of the last days or at least as a time of change.
- The historical drama is dualistic: the "just" are on the side of the absolutely good against the absolutely evil (e.g. "Satan", "Antichrist", "the Beast"); there is no room left for moral ambiguity.
- With regard to the historical drama, a pessimistic perspective, an optimistic perspective, or a gradual or simultaneous combination of both can be held. The pessimistic or "apocalyptic" perspective (*catastrophic millenarianism, apocalypticism*) is characterized by the expectation that the evil will gain the upper hand in the world, so that it has to be eliminated by a catastrophe which is brought about by superman intervention. In the course of this, the world as it is now will be destroyed; afterwards the millenarian salvation of the "just" will take place. In contrast, according to the optimistic perspective (*progressive millenarianism*), the millennium will be gradually established by the "just" themselves based on a superhuman plan and superhuman help – that is without a catastrophe.[6] In the following, we

[5] Sometimes "millennialism" with an explicit reference to the biblical millennium of peace is distinguished from "millenarianism" which does not necessarily include this reference (Robbins & Palmer, 1997).

[6] If an explicit reference to the biblical millennium of peace is given, the pessimistic perspective is often called "pre-millennialism", because the apocalyptic return of Christ is expected *before* the establishment of the millennium; the optimistic perspective, however, is often called "post-millennialism", because the return of Christ is supposed to occur *after* the believers have established the millennium.

wish to confine ourselves to those (most common) philosophies, in which the catastrophic-apocalyptic perspective dominates or is at least involved.

To illustrate contemporary chiliastic ideas, we will outline the beliefs of two Christian communities, namely the *New Apostolic Church* and *Jehovah's Witnesses*, which are those millenarian groups with the largest membership in Germany[7]. The catastrophic perspective dominates in both cases.

- The *New Apostolic Church* (in Germany: about 402,000 members), which developed out of the *Catholic-Apostolic Community*, an English foundation of the 19th century, perceives itself as a "bridal congregation" that expects the bridegroom at any moment: As soon as the "gathering of the elect" (John 10,16) has been completed, Jesus Christ will come back and take in the chosen – the dead ones as well as the living ones. On earth, Satan's rule over the infidels will reach its peak until Christ interferes again together with the chosen, overcomes – Satan and establishes the millennium of peace – with the possibility of converting the infidels. At the end of the millennium, Satan is permanently defeated, the Last Judgement takes place and finally the Eternal Kingdom of God is established. "Chief Apostle" Johann Gottfried Bischoff predicted the "First Resurrection" would take place in his lifetime; after his death (1960), the postponement of the parousia was explained as a change of God's will according to God's inscrutable ways (Valentin, 1997).
- *Jehovah's Witnesses* (in Germany: about 166,400 members), founded in the last third of the 19th century by Charles T. Russell in the USA, live with the expectation of an imminent end of the world, too: All political, economic, and church systems are destroyed in the "Battle of Armageddon" (Rev. 16,16); the Witnesses, however, will rise from the dead. The "144,000 marked with the seal of God" (Rev. 7,4), were reached in 1931 and have a "heavenly hope" at God's right side after resurrection. They are distinguished from the rest of the Witnesses who can (only) hope for an earthly paradise which will be established after a thousand year long Judgement Day (Valentin, 1997). In the history of the *Jehovah's Witnesses* concrete dates for the end of the world have been announced repeatedly. Referring to biblical statements, the Witnesses reacted to these wrong predictions with reinterpretations and new calculations (Zygmunt, 1970, 1972). At the moment, no specific date for the return of Christ is offered; however, the Witnesses still emphasize that it will not take long.

Other definitely chiliastic groups with a substantial membership in Germany are the *Mormons* (also: *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day*

[7] All counts of membership in the text refer to Germany and rely on the figures of the Religionswissenschaftlicher Medien- und Informationsdienst REMID e.V. available in the internet (http:\\www.uni-leipzig.de/˜religion/remid_info_zahlen.htm; October 23, 1997).

Saints; about 36,000 members; Introvigne, 1997; Valentin, 1997), the *Seventh-Day Adventists* (about 35,500 members; Lawson, 1997; Valentin, 1997), *Catholic-Apostolic Parishes* (about 12,000 members), the community *Universelles Leben* (formerly: *Heimholungswerk Jesu Christi*; about 5,000 members), and the *Unification Church* (about 2,500 members; Fuss, 1997b). However, characteristic chiliastic elements can also be detected in undercurrents of evangelical and Pentecostal-charismatic movements (Hempelmann, 1997) and – emphasizing Marian revelations – in marginal Catholic groups (Cuneo, 1997; Kohle, 1997); and furthermore – with a peculiar tension between closeness and distance to biblical ideas – in the context of an eschatological mysticism of esoteric provenance often called "New Age", with the expectation of the "Age of Aquarius" (Fuss, 1997a; Schweer, 1987).[8]

4. Coping with the Future through Chiliastic Expectations?

From a historical and sociological point of view, millenarian movements develop in times of cultural crises, when some social groups experience society at large as contradictory and conflicting. The chiliastic counterproject announces an inevitably approaching new social order and contains, inasmuch, a radical criticism of existing conditions and authorities (Bromley, 1997). Empirical research confirms that prior to contact with, and membership in, a millenarian group, people have often experienced depression, loss, or feelings of isolation and struggled with existential questions (Dawson, 1996; Kox, Hart, & Meeus, 1991). Previous religious or non-religious problem-solving strategies have turned out to be insufficient (Festinger, Riecken, & Schachter, 1956; Pargament, 1997). The experience of a crisis seems to be an important starting point to affirm chiliastic beliefs which are mostly considered absurd by outsiders.[9] Can chiliastic expectations be helpful for the individual in coping with the future?

Based on the coping approach that Pargament (1997) broadened for the psychology of religion, and in particular its functional perspective, we suggest interpreting the millenarian involvement of a person as a *re-creation* strategy of coping, in which he/she experiences a radical transformation of ends as well as means:

- Present life is no longer perceived as a continuation of a sorrowful past, but is legitimized by a promising future. It seems to be realistic that the new goal of life, the final salvation, can be obtained because the millennium is thought to be imminent.
- Personal crises of the past no longer appear to be meaningless, incomprehensible events, but inevitable consequences of the former disharmony between this world and the next.
- Since the individual is one of the "chosen", now on the side of the good, and knows that he/she is connected with the transcendental – directly or through participation in revelations – he/she acquires a new, special importance.
- The future may have threatening (apocalyptic) events in store; however, these events can be controlled and put into a context of meaning because of the availability of a "schedule of catastrophes." The threats are merely necessary transitional steps for the "chosen" on the way to final salvation. All infidels are in danger of being punished or exterminated – in the sense of the "belief in a just world" (Lerner, 1980).
- The changes of perspective, as they were described here, not only offer (and require) a new start, a "second chance" in life, but also provide new means for reaching final salvation: participation in revelations, preparation of millenarian events, orientation towards the millennium and possibly acquisition of new members.
- Since most of these activities are accompanied by an intra-group interaction, the individual experiences a continuous "consensual validation" of his/her chiliastic ideas and thus feels socially integrated and supported.

Thus, a functional approach suggests "that [millenarianism] is not inherently 'pathological', as many writers on the subject have implied" (Bromley, 1997, p. 42). Instead, central elements of chiliastic philosophies seem to convince the believer that his/her life has a meaning and a purpose despite the obvious suffering and evil in this world (O'Leary, 1994). The few empirical studies that have been carried out so far consequently show that the involvement in millenarian religious groups can be accompanied by an improvement of the psycho-social functioning (e.g. Galanter, Rabkin, Rabkin, & Deutsch, 1979; Köppl, 1990; Rochford, Purvis, & Eastman, 1989).

However, it cannot be ignored that the possibilities of chiliastic coping with the future can simultaneously involve specific difficulties. Millenarian movements mark a position *between* the present, evil world and a future, good, transcendentally legitimized order. This *structural liminality* (Bromley, 1997) encourages a derogation of this world.

- Chiliastic groups show clear tendencies to dissociate from existing society – they even block off and demonize those who do not share their beliefs.

[8] Apocalyptic-millenarian backgrounds can also be found in primarily political and social, i.e. secular movements (Lamy, 1997). Cohn (1961) already pointed out that National Socialism, as well as Communism, endowed social goals and conflicts with the transcendental meaning of the final end of the world drama. Recent examples are: the primeval and chiliastic myths of the neo-right scene in Germany (Sünner, 1997) and the millenarian ideas in the contexts of ecological (Lee, 1997) and feminist (Palmer, 1997) ideologies in the USA.

[9] A special situation exists when someone is born into a chiliastic religious community. The original crisis is not experienced by the individual himself/herself, but is handed down in the socialization process. At the same time, the millenarian counterproject is experienced as an almost complete representation of reality; means of comparison are lacking (Halperin, 1989).

In individual cases this can be reflected by terminating contacts with former friends and family; a possibly supportive social network is thus surrendered.

- An involvement in the future of this world seems to be rather irrelevant since the millennium is felt to be at hand's reach. This is shown in organization – the level of institutionalization of chiliastic groups often remains low – and also in personal provision, as is demonstrated in a case study by Murken (in press): "Expecting the final judgement which is announced by the *Jehovah's Witnesses* ... Mrs. Z. was at this point convinced ... that it was not worthwhile to start vocational training".

Millenarian involvement can thus imply a strict boundary between the religious and the secular world as well as elements of religious avoidance strategies: According to Pargament (1997), both are coping strategies which are more likely to be connected with unfavorable or at least mixed outcomes.

There are considerable risks when millenarian religious groups view the threshold to the "[world] that has yet to be born" (Bromley, 1997, p. 42) as reached or crossed; that is to say, when chiliastic scenarios are either expected on a specific date, when their realization is actively sought, or they are believed to be already present:

- Frequently, chiliastic leaders express their expectations by predicting specific dates for the end of this world. When the predicted date comes closer, members often break off ties with this society drastically; this leads to enormous new strain, as demonstrated by a case study of Festinger et al. (1956): "I've spent nearly all my money. I quit my job, I quit comptometer school, and my apartment costs me $ 100 a month" (p. 80). It might seem all the more surprising that in the early work of Festinger et al., as well as in later studies (Palmer & Finn, 1992; Zygmunt, 1970, 1972), it was observed that the members do not separate from the religious community after a wrong prediction, but that they adopt the rationalization offered by the leaders and recruit new members even more intensively. Festinger et al. explained this phenomenon by dissonance theory; however, it can also be understood as a cognitive appraisal in the context of the coping approach (Pargament, 1997): Since the cost of a break with the currently significant beliefs, relationships, and meaning-creating actions seems to be higher than the possible benefit of an involvement with realism and conformity (which proved disappointing before), chiliastic ends and means are intensified based on the pattern of "more of the same" (*preservation*). This process of appraisal can differ, however: Stark and Iannaccone (1997) convincingly prove that, for the *Jehovah's Witnesses* after wrong predictions, in particular in reoccurring cases, the numbers of resignations increase. Based on the example of a faction of the Baha'i, the *Baha'i Under the Provisions of the Convenient*, Balch, Domitrovic, Mahnke, and Morrison (1997) demonstrate furthermore that those members staying in the community after repeated wrong predictions develop strategies of moderation and denial, which weaken the impact of the predictions as well as the subsequent refutation from the start.

- Repeatedly, over the past 20 years, smaller apocalyptic groups committed or planned mass-suicide, murders among themselves or assassinations in spectacular ways.[10] Out of these occurrences the question arises of why millenarian movements lapse into violence. At the present state of analysis, the favoured prerequisites are to a major part specific religious beliefs: *a)* when apocalyptic groups believe they are authorized to initiate the start of apocalyptic events (Mayer, 1997) and *b)* if the apocalyptic group cherishes posttribulatory ideas: "Tribulation" is a term used for a millenarian phase which precedes the end of all history, in which – under the brutal

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[10] These include (in chronological order):
– 912 followers of the *Peoples Temple Movement* around Jim Jones, who died of poison in Jonestown in the South American Guyana in November 1978, after some American politicians intended to take some apostates back to the USA – from the perspective of the *Movement* the realm of the absolutely evil (Chidester, 1988; Moore & McGehee, 1989). The majority of the followers appears to have died voluntarily. However, it is evident that at least the 260 babies and children were first killed by their parent caretakers.
– 86 members of the *Branch Davidians* around David Koresh, who died in Waco/Texas in April 1993 after 51 days of siege, when the police and the military stormed their farm, which Koresh had previously set on fire. The Davidians, who had equipped themselves with weapons in preparation for Armaggedon, obviously interpreted the resulting conflict with the federal authorities as the beginning of the last battle between good and evil (Anthony & Robbins, 1997; Hase, 1995; Wright, 1995).
– 74 members of the *Order of the Solar Temple* around Luc Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro, who died in the Canadian Morin Heights in September 1994, in the Swiss alpine towns Cheiry and Granges-sur-Salvan in October 1994, in the French *Region des Vercors* in December 1995 and in Canada again in March 1997 – partly voluntarily – primarily of poison or shots to start a "transit into a higher form" to Sirius (Hall & Schuyler, 1997). According to their beliefs, life on earth did not originate on our planet, but was implanted by higher developed spiritual creatures, who themselves are tied to the energy of Sirius (Mayer, 1997). Some deaths in the *Order of the Solar Temple* have meanwhile turned out to be murders of "traitors".
– the Japanese group *Aum Shinrikyō* ("Teachings of the truth about the creative and destructive power in the universe") around Shoko Asahara which became known through the nerve gas sarin attack on the Tokyo subway in March 1995. The group predicts a worldwide nuclear war for the end of this millennium, out of which *Aum Shinrikyō* will emerge as the world government (Fuss, 1997b; Mullins, 1997; Repp, 1997).
– 39 members of the chiliastic group *Heaven's Gate* around Marshall H. Applewhite who poisoned themselves in San Diego/California in March 1997 and who obviously believed, according to their farewell video, that they would be brought to the "Celestial Kingdom" by highly developed extraterrestrials in a UFO in the tail of the comet Hale-Bopp before the "purification" of the earth.
– The group around the German psychologist Heide Fittkau-Garthe, a splinter group of the Indian movement *Brahma Kumaris* ("daughters of Brahma"), which supposedly planned mass suicide on Tenerife also to be brought into a better world on Sirius by a spaceship in a higher, non-material condition, before they were arrested by the police (Der Spiegel, 1998).

rule of evil – violence increases and armies are to be equipped for the last decisive battle. While the pretribulationists (who can be found more often) expect that they do not have to witness the tribulation because they will previously be saved, for example by being "carried up in the clouds" (1 Thes 4,16-17), the posttribulationists believe that they have to go through and survive tribulation. The pretribulatory assumption of salvation can keep the apocalypse at the horizon of the future although it is immediately at hand (O'Leary, 1994); posttribulationists, however, "may live *in* apocalyptic time such that any opposition or persecution that they experience may be identified literally with the catastrophic events of endtimes" (Robbins & Palmer, 1997, p. 12). A mentality of defense and survival is promoted in this way (cf. also Barkun, 1995). Factors favoring violence are not only to be seen in the religious beliefs, but also *c)* in the structural characteristics of the group: Violent activities are more likely when charismatic, authoritarian leaders identify the apocalyptic fate of mankind with the vicissitudes of their personal lives and demonize any kind of opposition (Rosenfeld, 1995) and if the group has created a closed, controllable environment (Thompson, 1996). Anthony and Robbins (1995, 1997) as well as Hase (1995) emphasize furthermore *d)* context criteria: Violent activities are more likely if the group is persecuted from outside or is provoked in other ways (or, respectively, if they believe they have observed hostile activities by those deemed to be their enemies).

5. Summarizing Discussion and Conclusions

Our paper approaches the topic of coping with future by religious means from a general and from a specific perspective. Based on the general perspective, we argue that coping with stress situations is in so far a form of coping with the future as maintaining or restoring one's future ability to act is in the center of the coping process. Then we pursue the question of which role religiosity can play in coping with the future. In this context, the broadening of the coping approach for the psychology of religion as suggested by Pargament serves our theoretical analysis. Pargament's conceptualizations and his synopsis of results show that religiosity is included in the coping process primarily by religiously active people, often in times of crises, in very different ways, and with positive or negative outcomes. Despite the vast number of empirical results, many questions remain open for psychological research. Nevertheless, Pargament's approach opens up a heuristic framework for the consideration of religious concepts of clients in counseling and psychotherapy.

From a specific perspective we have analyzed chiliastic cognitions of the future, i.e. the ideas of some religious communities about the imminent end of this world and of mankind. It might appear to be an exotic view at first sight, when such chiliastic expectations are understood as concrete, empirically occurring events, but this view is by no means scarce. Chiliastic ideas develop in times of crisis. We therefore examined, based on the approach of religious coping, what possibilities and risks may result from such chiliastic expectations. It was concluded that central elements of chiliastic ideas allow the believer to hold the constructive conviction that his/her life has significance and a purpose despite the obvious suffering and evil in this world. However, considerable risks are involved in chiliastic forms of coping, which arise out of the derogation of this world, the prediction of concrete dates for the end of times, and violence. All in all, a differentiated perspective has to be preferred; both affirmative and critical sweeping judgments of chiliastic groups – which frequently dominate the emotionalized debate about so-called New Religious Movements – should be avoided.

6. References

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Dipl.-Psych. Christian Zwingmann, Institut für Psychotherapie und Medizinische Psychologie der Universität Würzburg, RFB-Geschäftsstelle, Marcusstr. 9-11, D-97070 Würzburg
e-mail: ch.zwingmann@mail.uni-wuerzburg.de

Dr. Dipl.-Psych. Sebastian Murken, M.A., Universität Trier, Forschungszentrum für Psychobiologie und Psychosomatik, Arbeitsgruppe Religionspsychologie, Postfach 1553, D-55505 Bad Kreuznach
e-mail: smurken@mainz-online.de